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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

May 24, 1972

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~~TOP SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM FOR

Office of the Secretary of State
Office of the Secretary of Defense
Office of the Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Requirements of NSSM 151

The requirements of NSSM 151 have been met by the Memorandum for the President from the Deputy Secretary of Defense submitted May 19, 1972, titled Augmentation of Military Assistance to the RVN, and the decisions reflected in NSDM 168. No further action is required on NSSM 151.

Jeanne W. Davis
Staff Secretary

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Declassified/Released on 9/23/96
under provisions of E.O. 12958
by J. Saunders, National Security Council

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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under provisions of E.O. 12958
by J. Saunders, National Security Council

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Augmentation of Military Assistance to the RVN

At your request, I have examined the current status of military equipment deliveries to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and I have considered measures for strengthening RVNAF's capabilities by augmenting their equipment. The RVNAF equipment and supply augmentation is a desirable, but not a sufficient step in bolstering RVNAF capability. Sufficiency in the combat capability of the RVNAF depends, more than on equipment, on RVN will and desire. We must be careful not to delude the GVN and RVNAF that hardware can in some way substitute for backbone. In addressing equipment options, first priority has been given to sustaining the fighting ability of RVNAF in their current defense against a major NVA offensive and to insuring that the South Vietnamese have the weapons to defeat a second wave of the enemy attack if it should occur later this year. Measures which you may wish to consider for rapid deliveries of military equipment to South Vietnam if the diplomatic situation indicates that future deliveries of arms may be precluded are a secondary but potentially crucial area of concern. Finally, consideration has been given to high impact items which could be shipped to the RVN soon and which might have some effect as a token of our support for the GVN. Generally, these items would not be useable by the South Vietnamese until a substantial period of time for training or equipment repair had elapsed and they are costly items which would have to be drawn from our own forces. I, therefore, recommend that measures intended chiefly to gain high public impact be avoided. The desired impression of firm US support for the GVN can be made equally well by publicizing the major resupply effort now underway and by announcing the shipment of items chosen primarily for their ability to strengthen the RVNAF.

Budget Impact

The potential equipment add-ons discussed in this paper are unfunded and not programmed in either the FY 1972 or FY 1973 budgets. In addition to the cost of the options considered, you should be aware of an unfunded near term requirement of \$2.5 billion to finance the current higher level of activity of US and RVNAF forces through September 30, 1972. A solution to this \$2.5 billion funding requirement is considered urgent and essential. Further, the aggregate of funding requirements for RVNAF will exceed the authority included in the FY 1973 budget and will require an amended request for authority. The additional authority would equate to the cost of the options considered, plus approximately \$300 million estimated to be required for RVNAF in the currently unfunded total of \$2.5 billion.

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Present Logistical Actions to Sustain RVNAF Fighting Ability

A program to have in country all materiel required by the RVNAF in the Consolidated RVNAF Modernization Improvement Program (CRIMP) through FY 73 was virtually complete at the beginning of the NVA offensive on 1 April. A major effort to replace all the materiel destroyed in the current fighting is underway. RVNAF losses in some areas have been severe. Their supply posture at the onset of the enemy attack has prevented equipment shortages from degrading their combat ability despite heavy losses. A determining factor in this judgment is that frequently when major items are destroyed in combat, the soldiers operating the equipment become casualties and there is no one to operate replacement equipment even if it is provided immediately.

The status of key items of equipment for RVNAF is shown in enclosure 1. The urgent movement of this materiel and ammunition is receiving highest priority. With the exception of a few items that require a long leadtime until production, the materiel required can be delivered to the RVN within three months. The physical effort to ship items now in transit or scheduled to be moved in the next few months will tax available air and sea transportation, to include commercial augmentation. Fortunately, enough capacity is available to support the effort. Our ability to deliver equipment will exceed the ability of the South Vietnamese to receive, secure and forward it. Their capacity to receive equipment is the pacing factor of our resupply effort. In addition, the RVNAF will have problems in securing, operating, and - particularly - maintaining much of this equipment.

This ongoing effort of major resupply has three effects of greatest importance:

- It sustains RVNAF's ability to fight the present battle.
- It maintains stocks of ammunition, spare parts, and attrition stocks of weapons for RVNAF in the event diplomatic initiatives should require a halt in our military assistance shipments.
- It dramatizes to the South Vietnamese and to their enemy that US support for the RVN remains firm.

Although delivery of equipment to maintain RVNAF's full stockage of presently authorized equipment is receiving first priority, equipment in addition to that provided in the CRIMP and judged to be necessary for the current fighting is being sent to the South Vietnamese. These items include:

- TOW anti-tank missiles now in the possession of US troops in Vietnam who are conducting on-the-job training of the South Vietnamese.

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- Equipment to convert 32 UH-1H utility helicopters to helicopter gunships.
- Improved helicopter rocket pods to triple the rocket firepower of VNAF helicopter gunships.
- Radios for aircraft to standardize the mixture that now exists in VNAF and improve maintainability.

The above items of equipment are being provided to the RVNAF on an expedited basis. These additions to the South Vietnamese forces will help to fill recognized deficiencies and they avoid the constraints which would complicate a large effort to rapidly provide significant additional new types of weapons to the RVNAF. The constraining factors on introducing new weapons systems are:

- RVNAF capability to absorb:
 - RVNAF technical proficiency at operating and maintaining the weapons they now possess has been stretched thin by rapid expansion and the lack of technical experience in South Vietnamese society.
 - The 1.1 million man RVNAF strength ceiling is necessary for economic and political reasons. Manpower constraints usually make it necessary to shift military personnel from their present duties to man a new weapon. With each weapon or unit added, therefore, a previous weapon or unit must be discontinued and a period of retraining is necessary. A careful judgment of the trade-offs which would be generated by the introduction of each weapons system is necessary because of the reorganization of present units and resulting temporary loss of combat effectiveness which frequently is caused by introducing new equipment.
- Time:
 - The time required for a weapon to become useful to the RVNAF because of training requirements may be excessive for the current situation.
 - The time to acquire and deliver some equipment renders it infeasible for consideration.
 - The times reported in this memorandum are dates of arrival at ports of embarkation. If shipment is expedited, equipment may be expected to arrive in Vietnam in three days, if shipped by air, and three weeks, if sent by surface transportation.

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- Supportability:

Some sophisticated weapons systems would not be supportable to the RVNAF without extensive direct US military or contractor support for a prolonged period. Either legislative action or diplomatic initiatives could force withdrawal of the required US support.

- Impact on US Forces:

-- US Forces worldwide have experienced considerable degradation of their combat readiness due to force augmentations for Southeast Asia.

-- Additional degradation would be experienced if sophisticated weapons were drawn from our forces for use by RVNAF.

- Costs:

-- In the absence of an adequate supplementary appropriation, progressively serious reductions in US Forces readiness would occur as a result of budget reprogramming actions which will be required. Equipment modernization of the Services would be delayed, war reserve materiel stocks - already low - would not be replenished, operational training would be drastically reduced.

-- Costs discussed in describing the options below are estimates of initial budgetary impact - current cost of the item and overhaul if needed. They are understated because most major new items require support equipment, incur considerable operating costs, increase ammunition expenses, etc., all of which may cost more per year than the item itself.

- Transportation:

Available transport and the South Vietnamese ability to receive materiel constrain the rate at which it can be shipped.

- Maintenance:

The RVNAF is at least three years away from achieving the planned level of maintenance self-sufficiency for currently programmed equipment. Trained personnel are the pacing factor for RVNAF's development. In the interim, commercial contractors and US military advisors provide the necessary maintenance skill.

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Measures to Improve RVNAF Capability

The options to provide additional military assistance presented herein have been developed with the above constraints in mind. The options describe equipment which could be provided to RVNAF in order to meet one or more of three decision criteria:

- To contribute to immediate RVNAF combat capability. These items could be shipped in a short time, require minimum new training for RVNAF, and would help to augment current RVNAF capabilities.
- To strengthen RVNAF's equipment posture in the event a cease-fire or legislative action should preclude the delivery of additional or new type weapons. Items shipped in meeting this criterion may not become operational until after a substantial period of training and until RVNAF develops a maintenance support capability. Such equipment "stored" in South Vietnam is vulnerable to deterioration, pilferage, and enemy action.
- To provide equipment intended to demonstrate continued US support of the GVN. These items also may not become operational for a long period of time. In addition, they may severely tax RVNAF support ability, divert resources from more effective weapons systems or be inherently less desirable than other equipment. They might, however, increase South Vietnamese confidence in our support or signal the firmness of that support to North Vietnam and its allies. It is believed that adequately publicizing the scope of our current effort and of any new measures to provide equipment to RVNAF would provide public impact without providing equipment only for that purpose.

Available Options

The relative weight placed on the three criteria above drives the selection of the options believed most appropriate. Enclosure 2 contains a detailed discussion of the possible equipment add-ons we may want to provide the RVNAF. Included in Enclosure 2 is a discussion of the costs, impact on US world-wide military capability, and RVNAF absorption capability associated with each potential equipment add-on. The equipment add-ons have been summarized and categorized into three option groups to provide a basis for a decision.

The three options groups are developed on a "building-block" concept. Option 1 represents a minimum action and includes only those equipment items which are believed to be necessary to sustain the RVNAF in the current combat situation. Included are items which the RVNAF needs and can use in the current combat situation, assuming a continued US air and naval participation in the fighting in Southeast Asia. Option 1 contains two

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Sub-options: 1A includes only those additional items believed essential; and 1B includes those items in 1A plus additional items which would further enhance RVNAF's combat capability.

Option 2 includes Option 1 plus it provides additional equipment which the RVNAF should have if the US were to withdraw for other than military reasons from SEA in the next 2 to 4 months. Items included in this option are ones which the RVNAF could not immediately use effectively, which could eventually provide them with greater military capabilities. Option 2 includes two sub-options. 2A includes those items believed essential to the RVNAF should the US withdraw quickly from SEA, and 2B includes additional items that would provide RVNAF with even greater capability.

Option 3 provides additional equipment with the principal objective of demonstrating US resolve and determination in supporting the SVN (i.e., highly visible equipment). In all probability, this equipment would not become useful to the RVNAF for years, if at all.

The discussion of each option includes a summary of: (1) the equipment to be turned over; and (2) the primary impacts of pursuing that option, i.e., budgetary cost, impact on US worldwide military capabilities, and whether RVNAF can actually use the equipment now.

Option 1: Equipment needed for immediate combat capability.

Option 1A: Minimum essential needed.

- Provide an additional 32 UH-1 assault helicopters.
- Provide 30 STOL aircraft.
- Provide 850 60 mm mortars.
- Provide 30 TOW anti-tank weapons.

Option 1B: Option 1A plus additional items which provide an enhanced RVNAF capability.

- Provide 5 additional F-5A aircraft.
- Provide 48 additional A-37 aircraft.
- Provide an additional 70 TOW.
- Provide 4 Patrol Craft Inshore ships (PCF).

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This option would provide the RVNAF with the major equipment items believed necessary for countering the NVA in the current combat situation. Option 1A would provide added assault helicopter, gunship, indirect fire support, and anti-tank capabilities. Option 1B would, in addition, provide added air support, air defense, and coastal patrol capabilities. The only significant impact on US worldwide military capability from Option 1B is a moderately serious short-term reduction in US anti-tank capabilities in 1969 (due to withdrawals of TOW from NATO). The RVNAF is capable of absorbing and using effectively all items in both options, although in some instances there would be minor delays until all units became fully trained and effective. Option 1A has an estimated budgetary cost of \$40 million and option 1B an estimated initial cost of \$70 million.

Option 2: Option 1 plus equipment the RVNAF needs if the US should withdraw from Southeast Asia in the next 2 to 4 months.

Option 2A: Minimum essential needed equipment.

- Accelerate delivery of 14 RC-47 aircraft (reconnaissance aircraft).
- Accelerate delivery of 23 AC-119K aircraft (fixed wing gunships).
- Accelerate delivery of 23 EC-47 aircraft (intelligence collection aircraft).
- Accelerate delivery of 2 WHEC ships (coastal patrol and naval gunfire support ships).
- Provide 12 C-119G aircraft for maritime patrol.
- Provide 32 self-propelled twin-40 mm air defense guns.
- Provide 1 M-48 tank battalion.
- Provide 2 composite field artillery battalions (8 inch howitzers and 175 mm guns).

Option 2B: Option 2A plus additional items which would enhance RVNAF capability.

- Accelerate delivery of 28 C-7 aircraft (transport aircraft).
- Accelerate delivery of 1 additional WHEC ship (coastal patrol and naval gunfire support ship).
- Provide 1 additional M-48 tank battalion.
- Provide 1 additional composite field artillery battalion (8 inch howitzers and 175 mm guns).

REST OF
ATTACHMENTS⁸ NOT
COPIED

Encl 1

This option would provide those items included in Option 1 plus some items believed needed if the US were to withdraw from Southeast Asia. Option 2A provides equipment which, after about one year of crew and maintenance training and logistical system development, would result in improved RVNAF reconnaissance, intelligence collection, gunship, coastal patrol, air defense, tank, and artillery capabilities. Option 2B would provide a further increase in these same capabilities plus an added airlift capability. Prior to completion of the required training program, however, this additional equipment would not materially improve RVNAF capabilities. In fact, it is likely that some degradation in combat capability would occur initially as units began switching to the newer equipment. Option 2A would result in a limited impact on US capabilities because it would temporarily reduce Reserve forces tank assets. Option 2B would, in addition, result in a degradation in STRAF air defense capabilities. Option 2A would have an estimated initial budgetary cost of \$100 million and Option 2B an estimated cost of \$120 million.

Option 3: Equipment which provides highly visible demonstration of US support for SVN. Implementation of this option is not recommended.

- Provide 1 Air Cavalry Troop for each Military Region of South Vietnam (144 Cobras, 160 LOHs, and 128 UH-1Hs).
- Provide 4 HAWK Air Defense Battalions.
- Provide 56 A-4B aircraft.
- Provide 3 squadrons of F-4 aircraft.

This option would provide equipment which would demonstrate in a visible manner US support for the RVN. Two items of equipment included in the option would require as much as two years for training and logistical development before the RVNAF could begin to use them effectively. At the end of this period the RVNAF would possess substantially improved helicopter, gunship, air defense, close air support, and interdiction capabilities. Nevertheless, providing the equipment within this option would result in a significant degradation in US assault helicopter and F-4 capabilities, and a minor reduction in STRAF air defense capabilities. If the RVNAF made a determined effort to develop the capability to use this equipment, this option would result in a one to two year reduction in RVNAF combat capabilities as the necessary training would divert critically scarce skilled combat-maintenance personnel from operational RVNAF units. This option would have an estimated initial budgetary impact of \$400 million and would generate large support costs.

* Emmet Rush